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PROGRESS REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF UNCTAD'S PUBLICATIONS POLICY

Report by the UNCTAD secretariat

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1. The principles underlying UNCTAD's publications policy and the guidelines governing their implementation are contained in the *Report on documentation and publications* (TD/B/EX(15)/5), which was endorsed by the Secretary-General of UNCTAD in May 1997. Apart from guiding principles, the *Report* contains a number of specific recommendations designed to respond to the needs of member States, to conform to recent changes in United Nations publications policy, to improve UNCTAD's impact and outreach, and to make the most cost-effective use of resources.

2. For the sixteenth executive session of the Trade and Development Board on 16 February 1998, the secretariat prepared a *Progress report on the implementation of UNCTAD's publications policy* (TD/B/EX(16)/3). That report covered developments during the period May 1997-January 1998. In May 1998, after a lengthy intergovernmental consultative process, the Working Party on the Medium-term Plan and the Programme Budget decided on a modality for the future scrutiny of UNCTAD's publications policy (TD/B/45/5-TD/B/WP/107). Meanwhile, the secretariat continued to implement that policy within the limits of available resources. This report describes developments since the issuance of the first progress report.

1. The preparation of the publications programme for 2000-2001

3. At the centre of UNCTAD's publications policy is the Publications Committee, which is charged with overseeing the effective implementation of the policy. During the current reporting period, the Committee's main activity has been the launching of the preparatory process for UNCTAD's publications programme for 2000-2001 through a request to programme managers to draw up their proposed list of publications for the new biennium. The draft publications programme was compiled and submitted to the Committee for review and subsequently to the Secretary-General for endorsement. It was later approved, with some revisions relating largely to the number of proposed sales publications, by the Subgroup on the Publications Programme of the UNOG Working Group of the Publications Board.

4. In early November 1998, the draft was distributed to member States in the form of a questionnaire. Information provided on each publication proposal included mandate, purpose, target readership, periodicity and language versions. It will be recalled that this survey was introduced in response to the concern expressed in earlier discussions at the Working Party that Geneva-based delegates were not necessarily experts on some subjects and could therefore not effectively review the programme, which consisted essentially of a list of titles. By making the proposed publications programme available well in advance of the January 1999 session of the Working Party, this questionnaire sought to facilitate the task of that body by allowing experts located in capitals to be consulted. In tandem with the distribution of the questionnaire, delegations were briefed on the draft publications programme at an informal meeting called by the Chairman of the Working Party on 16 November. The results of the questionnaire are being made available to the Working Party's current session as part of its discussions on UNCTAD's 2000-2001 work programme.

2. Other matters addressed by the Publications Committee

5. Other matters addressed by the Committee in 1998 included the new procedures for scrutinizing the publications policy and programme, language versions of the flagship reports, co-publishing, electronic publication and the UNCTAD Web site. The Committee also reviewed and cleared a few proposals for publications which were not originally envisaged in the publications programme.

6. Regarding translation of the flagship reports, a special effort was made this year to get the first half of the *Trade and Development Report* translated into all languages in time for the High-level Segment of the Trade and Development Board. However, the broader problems involved in translating these reports remain to be resolved.

7. UNCTAD continued to strengthen its working relationship with UNOG during the past year. UNCTAD is represented on the UNOG Working Group of the Publications Board, which deals with a range of matters relating to publications delegated to it by the Publications Board in New York. In the area of co-publications, the Chief of Sales and Marketing of Publications at UNOG was invited to a Publications Committee meeting to give a briefing on various aspects of co-publications, including United Nations procedures and contractual matters. Moreover, UNCTAD has drawn upon the expertise available in UNOG to pursue co-publishing as a means of expanding the dissemination of its publications. UNOG staff have also been most helpful in evaluating the legal and commercial aspects of proposed co-publishing contracts. The Publications Committee has surveyed the co-publishing arrangements entered into in the past with a view to drawing the appropriate lessons.

8. The Chief of Sales and Marketing of Publications at UNOG was also invited to discuss the pricing policy for UNCTAD's sales publications with a view to taking greater account of market conditions and of the prices of comparable publications. In 1998, UNCTAD issued 18 sales publications, as compared to 17 in 1997 and 10 in 1996 (a Conference year).

9. During the preparatory process of the publications programme for 2000-2001, programme managers were informed about the new United Nations guidelines on attribution of authorship. Since these guidelines remain largely at the level of principles, however, with their interpretation left to the author departments, the Publications Committee has decided to take up this issue in the near future so as to determine how they could in practice be applied to the various types of publications. Where a publication fits clearly into one of the categories included in the guidelines, however, attribution is allowed.

10. Some progress has been made in the area of electronic publishing. For example, the Publications Committee approved a proposal to issue the *Handbook of International Trade and Development Statistics* in CD-ROM form, annexed to a smaller hard-copy version with abbreviated/aggregated data. The necessary technical preparations are in hand and the new policy will apply as from the next issue of the *Handbook*.

11. The use of the Internet for dissemination of documentation has been further enhanced over the past year. Most notably, the French and Spanish versions of the UNCTAD World Wide Web site (http://www.unctad.org) were launched in May 1998. Pre-sessional documents continue to be available on UNCTAD's Web site four weeks in advance of the relevant intergovernmental meeting and the substantive output of meetings appears on the Web site as soon as it is in final form. Efforts are being made to develop a search engine for UNCTAD publications on the Web site. Scarcity of resources, however, acts as a constraint on the speed at which improvements can take place.

3. The Flagship Report Review Panel

12. A second key component of UNCTAD's publications policy is the Flagship Report Review Panel, whose role is to coordinate UNCTAD's three main annual publications: the *Trade and Development Report (TDR)*, the *World Investment Report (WIR)*, and the *Least Developed Countries Report (LDCR)*. During the year, the Panel met first to review the outlines and then to consider drafts of the 1998 editions of the reports and to clear the final products. As a

result, it has been possible to promote complementarity and consistency among the reports, avoid duplication and facilitate the cross-fertilization of ideas. Some progress has also been made on staggering the launching of the three reports. However the timing is constrained by the fact that both the *TDR* and the *LDCR* serve as documentation for the same meeting, that is the regular session of the Trade and Development Board (TDB). The Panel is currently beginning its examination of the outlines for the 1999 editions of the reports.

13. In New York no progress has been made on the Office of Internal Oversight Services' proposal to have a centralized policy of peer review. UNCTAD's decision to set up its own procedure for clearing its flagship reports through the Panel appears to have been vindicated.

4. Planning and production of individual publications

14. Once the publications programme has been approved, planning for production of individual publications can commence. As part of the planning system for intergovernmental meetings, outlines of parliamentary documentation are discussed well in advance of the meeting concerned. The supervisory mechanism for policy clearance seeks to ensure policy consistency across the secretariat and conformity with established guidelines under the authority of the Deputy Secretary-General. The guidelines on page limits continue to be applied despite the inherent difficulties often involved in properly addressing a substantive issue in 16 pages.

15. In order to improve the user friendliness of UNCTAD's reports, executive summaries are now required for all pre-sessional documentation and strongly encouraged for all other documentation. The executive summaries are being placed on UNCTAD's Web site and will be used for the *UNCTAD Guide to Publications* and as a means for publicizing UNCTAD's work through the medium of international economics networks and databases.

16. The system of active monitoring of the documentation production process continues to function. The secretariat's performance in terms of meeting deadlines for the printing and distribution of documents for intergovernmental meetings slipped slightly, particularly in the second half of the year, as compared to 1997, but was still considerably better than in 1995 and 1996. In 1998, 72 per cent of pre-sessional documents were submitted in time for the 10-week rule or not more than three days late, as compared to 76 per cent in 1997, 66 per cent in 1996, and 52 per cent in 1995.

5. Assessment

17. Developments on assessment of the quality and impact of UNCTAD publications include the following:

An *ex-post* survey was carried out among member States covering 1997 publications the results of which were before the Working Party at its May 1998 session. An ex-post survey for 1998 publications will be carried out in the first quarter of 1999.

An *ex-ante* survey has been undertaken for the list of publications proposed for the 2000-2001 biennium, to ascertain the potential usefulness of individual publications the results of which are before the Working Party at the current session.

Meanwhile, as an integral part of their management responsibilities, programme managers continued to seek feedback from readers and will present to the Working Party the results of such feedback received on individual publications.

Readership survey forms continue to be available on UNCTAD's Web site but the response continues to be disappointing.

In the agreed conclusions of UNCTAD intergovernmental meetings held in 1998, there were often positive references to the quality of UNCTAD documentation. For example, in the agreed conclusions adopted at its forty-fifth session, the Trade and Development Board expressed "its appreciation for the sound, independent and timely analysis provided in this year's *Trade and Development Report*". It also "commended the secretariat for the high quality of the *[Least Developed Countries 1998] Report* and its comprehensive analysis of the economic performance of LDCs and the opportunities and constraints facing LDCs in attempts to enhance their participation in the multilateral trading system."

Also, in the ministerial communiqué of ECOSOC 1998, ministers expressed their "appreciation to the secretariats of UNCTAD and WTO for jointly preparing the excellent report [on market access] for the High-level Segment."

At the first part of its thirty-eighth session in June 1998, in its report on evaluation, the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC) cited the UNCTAD secretariat's approach to assessment "which emphasized feedback from and participation of Governments" as an example of good practice (E/AC.51/1998/L.7/Add.21, para.3). The same report called for the dissemination of good practices as a means of improving efficiency and effectiveness.

6. External developments

18. At the session referred to above, CPC also had before it the report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) entitled "United Nations publications: enhancing cost-effectiveness in implementing legislative mandates" (JIU/REP/97/2), as well as a note by the Secretary-General of the United Nations containing his comments on the report (A/52/685). The report was also subsequently reviewed ACABQ). At its fifty-third session of the General Assembly, the Fifth Committee had before it the comments of the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the reports of CPC (A/53/16) and ACABQ (A/53/669) thereon. However, no action was taken on these various reports as the Committee decided to defer consideration of them to its resumed session.

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